

Message Text

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SUBJECT: VP MOBAREK'S COMMENTS ON PRES. ASAD AND SYRIAN BAATH

REF: CAIRO 4146

1. WHILE WE CANNOT GAINSAY REFTTEL'S REPORT THAT SADAT AND MOBAREK PERSONALLY MAINTAIN DEGREE OF RESPECT FOR PRES. ASAD AND SEEK TO FOCUS GOE COUNTERATTACK TO SYRIAN PROPAGANDA BLASTS AT BAATH PARTY RATHER THAN ASAD PERSONALLY, HIS APPROACH IS NOT CURRENTLY RECIPROCATED AT SENIOR LEVELS OF SARG. SADAT HAS BEEN CRITICIZED BY NAME IN SPEECHES BY PRES. ASAD AS RECENTLY AS MARCH 8, 1976, AND PRESS IS FULL OF CRITICISM OF "SADAT REGIME" BY SYRIAN COLUMNISTS WHO FAITHFULLY REFLECT SENTIMENTS OF SARG LEADERSHIP. ASAD HAS NOT HESITATED TO PLACE RESPONSIBILITY FOR SINAI ACCORD SQUARELY ON SADAT'S SHOULDERS. REPORTING AND EDITORIALS IN SYRIAN PRESS HAVE BEEN SUGGESTED THAT EGYPTIAN LEADERSHIP HAS BECOME DIVIDED AND IS UNDER INCREASING CRITICISM FROM EGYPTIAN POPULACE AND ARMY.

2. ASAD'S MOTIVES MAY BE MIXED BUT BASIC AMONG THEM IS FIRST A PERSONAL FEELING OF BITTERNESS AGAINST SADAT WHOM HE BLAMES NOT ONLY FOR SIGNING THE SINAI ACCORD BUT ALSO FOR MISLEADING SYRIA DURING THE SINAI NEGOTIATIONS. IN SYRIAN EYES SADAT BEARS THE DOUBLE ONUS OF HAVING BETRAYED SYRIA BY SIGNING A SEPARATE AGREE-

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MENT WITH NO LINK TO SYRIA OR PALESTINIANS AND ALSO OF

HAVING BROKEN THE DEEPLY LONGED FOR AND MOMENTARILY ACHIEVED STATE OF ARAB UNITY WHICH EXISTED, ALBEIT WITH STRAINS, FROM OCTOBER 1973 THROUGH AUGUST 1975. IT CANNOT BE DENIED THAT ASAD IS ALSO TRYING TO USE HIS OPPOSITION TO SADAT TACTICALLY, IN ORDER TO INCREASE HIS OWN PRESTIGE AND INFLUENCE VIS-A-VIS EGYPTIAN LEADER.

3. WE UNCERTAIN WHY MOBAREK BELIEVES "ASAD'S HANDS ARE TO A CONSIDERABLE EXTENT TIED BY THE BAATH. HE MUST TREAD CAREFULLY IN DEALING WITH IT." IN OUR VIEW, BAATH PARTY AS SUCH IS NOT NORMALLY A MAJOR CONSTRAINING FACTOR ON ASAD'S POLICY, THOUGH HE HAS TO SPEND CERTAIN AMOUNT OF TIME MANIPULATING REGIONAL AND NATIONAL PARTY COMMANDS. HE CERTAINLY WAS NOT SWEEPED ALONG BY EMOTIONAL OR IDEOLOGICAL BAATHIST TIDE AS REGARDS HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH EGYPT. LAST SEPTEMBER, ACCORDING TO OUR UNDERSTANDING, IT WAS ASAD'S ADVISORS WHO DREW UP STATEMENT CONDEMNING SINAI ACCORD WHICH ASAD THEN PRESENTED TO COMBINED MEETING OF BAATH REGIONAL AND NATIONAL COMMANDS FOR APPROVAL. ONLY AFTER THIS DECISION DID PARTY LEADERS BEGIN MOBILIZING PUBLIC OPINION AGAINST SINAI AGREEMENT.

4. WE HAVE AS YET DETECTED NO SIGNALS THAT SARG LEADERSHIP DESIRES TO TEMPER ITS DISPUTE WITH GOE. LEBANESE CRISIS HAS ONLY SERVED TO OFFER TO SYRIANS ADDITIONAL "EVIDENCE" OF HARMFUL EFFECT OF SADAT'S DECISION TO SIGN AGREEMENT, I.E., EGYPT IS HELPING KEEP LEBANESE POT BOILING TO PROTECT SINAI ACCORD. HOWEVER, EVEN MOST CRITICAL SYRIANS WILL SAY THAT THEIR DISPUTE WITH SADAT, THOUGH BITTER, IS TEMPORARY AND THAT IN LONG RUN ARAB DESTINY IS ONE. IF ONE MORNING THEY WAKE TO NEWS OF SADAT AND ASAD EMBRACING ON SOME ARAB TARMAC, OR UNDER THE BENIGN EYE OF KING KHALID, THEY WILL NOT BE SURPRISED. THEY WILL WELCOME IT.

MURPHY

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